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WILLIAM UHLER HENSEL

AN APPRECIATION
BY BARR FERRÉE
DIRECTOR OF THE
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WILLIAM UHLER HENSEL

The leading events in the life of William Uhler Hensel may be quickly outlined. He was born at Quarryville, Lancaster County, December 4, 1851. He was the son of George Washington and Anna Maria Uhler Hensel. He was graduated from Franklin and Marshall College in 1870, receiving his master's degree in 1873. On October 13, 1875, he married Miss Emily Flinn. His profession was the law. He was Attorney-General of Pennsylvania from 1891 to 1895. He received the honorary degree of LL.D. from Dickinson College in 1909 and from Washington and Lee University in 1910. Franklin and Marshall made him a Litt.D. in 1912. For some years he was Vice-President of the Board of Trustees of Franklin and Marshall College, becoming President of the Board in 1914. He was President of the Board of Trustees of the Henry G. Long Asylum. These are the chief dates in his life as recorded by himself for The Pennsylvania Society. To complete the rec-

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ord his death at Savannah, Georgia, on February 27, 1915, should be added.

A meagre outline of a great career, with little to shadow forth the distinguished life with which it is concerned. To those who knew Dr. Hensel only in the last ten or fifteen years the details of his earlier life contain many elements of surprise. Scarcely had he completed his college course than he embarked in an aggressive political career that lasted many years, appearing on the stump before he had attained voting age. He was admitted to the Bar January 23, 1873. In the following year he purchased a half interest in the Lancaster Intelligencer, and became one of its editors and proprietors. Thus at the beginning he chose to follow three great interests, politics, journalism and the law, any one of which was more than sufficient to demand the undivided attention of an ordinary man. That he should have triumphed in each of these callings is splendid testimony to his great mental attainments.

Dr. Hensel long since renounced journalism, yet his editorial work was of en-

grossing interest to him. In 1880 his joint professions of lawyer and editor embroiled him in serious trouble. For criticism of a case before the Lancaster courts he and his partner were disbarred; both were subsequently restored to their full rights on appeal to the Supreme Court, and Dr. Hensel took natural pride in being instrumental in holding the freedom of the press in a case in which he was the chief actor. So widely was his work as a journalist appreciated that in 1882 and 1883 he was chosen President of the Pennsylvania Editorial Association. In 1886 he disposed of his newspaper interest, and in the following year formed a law partnership with J. Hay Brown, now Chief Justice of Pennsylvania.

Dr. Hensel's editorial work was a vigorous aid to his political activities. He was chairman of the Democratic County Committee from 1875 to 1887, save for two years when he was State Chairman. He was a delegate to the Democratic National Conventions of 1880, 1884, 1888, and 1892, making one of the nominating speeches for Grover Cleveland at the last-

named. Throughout this long term of years he has not only made many political speeches, but he did much political writing of a high order of interest and of unusual value to his party. He was a Democratic State Chairman in the Pattison campaign of 1882, and was unquestionably largely influential in the success his candidate then achieved. But it was not until the second Pattison campaign that he felt at liberty to accept office as the Attorney-General of Pennsylvania, an honour rightly due him, not as a crown for his political career, but as a just recognition of his great abilities as a lawyer by a party to which he had given so much of his energy and his genius.

To those familiar with Dr. Hensel's life, his political activities and his tenure of the great office of Attorney-General of Pennsylvania bulk large in any estimate formed of him. Yet as he had closed his editorial career in 1886, so the chapter of his political activities came to an end in 1906, when his party became identified with now forgotten silver heresy.

Yet while all this prodigious activity in

lines outside his profession was being developed, Dr. Hensel had by no means subordinated his interest in the law. This, indeed, we may well believe always to have been first, otherwise his distinguished attainments in this most difficult of professions would have been unobtainable. His partnership continued to 1899, when Mr. Brown became a Justice of the Supreme Court. It was a remarkable partnership in many ways, for Mr. Brown was as pronounced a Republican as Dr. Hensel was a Democrat. The new firm quickly rose to prominence, and Dr. Hensel's career at the Bar became a long series of personal triumphs.

One not a lawyer cannot adequately discuss this most important side of Dr. Hensel's life; but the vast multitude of cases that came to him; the importance of the corporations and clients that sought his services; the honours his professional brethren gladly gave him, both within and without the legal associations, speak with no uncertain voice. Here, at last, was the real Hensel, resourceful, alert, learned, rapid in thought and in action, keen in

research, swift in application, bold in expediencies, polished in thought and in diction, endowed with a natural eloquence that long practice had brought to a rich fruition.

And it is in the real Hensel that the great interest lies; not in the journalist, not in the politician, not in the lawyer, but in the man himself; in that richly dowered mind, supersaturated with knowledge, overrunning with learning, keenly alive to life and all that it means; a man not only in touch with many forms of activity, but actually dominating them; a man who, time and again, brought forth the quiet learning of the library and set it out in the broad light of life; a man of kindly feeling and warm friendships, and of amazing sociability, whose impromptu entertainments, often arranged on a most astonishing scale, were a constant delight to those who participated in them.

I have indicated how Dr. Hensel's interests were developed on the three lines of journalism, politics and the law; but there was still another form of activity that was very dear to him, and which per-

haps yielded him more joy than anything else, and this was his studentship. Dr. Hensel was a profound student and scholar, words ofttimes lightly used, but in his case most accurately applied. His favourite study was his own county, in which he was born, and in which his whole life was passed. He was the personification of Lancaster County, deeply versed in its history, profoundly interested in its people, its greatest living exponent. His voice, his time, his mind were always at its service, his knowledge of Lancaster County history and Lancaster County affairs was so intimate as to well warrant being called complete. And the harvest he gathered was rich. Lancaster County is alive with history and Dr. Hensel found many points of interest to absorb his attention. His studies ripened into many pamphlets, dealing with the most widely different topics: biography, politics, history, topography, art criticism, belles lettres; pamphlets that followed each other in rapid succession, more particularly in the later years of his life; splendid contributions to local history, local biog-

raphy, local events, and many of a wider interest than afforded by the abundant themes of Lancaster County. Any half dozen of these careful studies would have sufficed to have given him standing as an historian of the first rank; yet Dr. Hensel left no book that may serve as a climax to his years of study and his life-time of accomplishment.

And now this voice is stilled. The orator that moved so many minds is silent; the pen that wrote so admirably on so many subjects has been laid aside forever; the great lawyer has pleaded his last case. Lancaster has lost her foremost citizen, and a shining light has been extinguished in Pennsylvania. Hensel is dead. Pennsylvania is bereaved; and her sons, standing by his bier-side, may well regard their loss as irreparable.

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